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ABSTRACT

This study assessed the extent to which information about Japan is taught in secondary world history classrooms in Texas, Oklahoma, and Louisiana. The sample used for this study was 475 world history teachers, randomly selected, in K-12 school districts scattered across Texas, Oklahoma, and Louisiana. A 21-item questionnaire was mailed to each of the teachers. Responses were received from 195 teachers. The Statistical Analysis System (SAS) computer program for the social sciences was used to list the frequency distributions and to calculate the mean, standard deviation, and range for each of the variables taken from the questionnaire. From the study sample, it was determined that the amount of teaching time devoted to the study of Japan varies significantly among teachers. While world history teachers spend between six to seven class hours teaching about Japanese history, little time is given to teaching about Japan's economic growth or about its role as a world trade leader. Teachers reported that only about one-third of their students are likely to view an educational film or filmstrip on Japan, and few of their students hear guest lecturers on Japan. However, teachers rank the importance of teaching about Japan rather high. Only teaching about Russia and China were rated as more important topics. (SM)

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A STUDY TO REPORT THE TEACHING ABOUT JAPAN IN SECONDARY WORLD HISTORY CLASSROOMS IN TEXAS, OKLAHOMA, AND LOUISIANA

Paper Presented at the 67th Annual Meeting of the
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A STUDY TO REPORT THE TEACHING ABOUT JAPAN IN SECONDARY WORLD HISTORY CLASSROOMS IN TEXAS, OKLAHOMA, AND LOUISIANA

Introduction

Currently in the United States there is a growing recognition of the need for schooling which stresses global education. This seems to be especially true regarding awareness of Japanese life and culture. It is well known that Japan's unsurpassed industrial productivity over the past several years has fascinated the American business community. Moreover, the U.S. Department of Education's landmark report, A Nation at Risk, released in 1983 clearly inferred that Japanese education had played a significant role in Japan's economic success. Shimahara (1985) reported that American journalists also attributed Japan's industrial strength to its competitive educational system. It is not surprising that when President Reagan and Prime Minister Nakasone met in 1983, one of the outcomes of their discussions was an agreement that both the United States and Japan would undertake a study of each other's educational system (Japanese Education Today, 1987). Such cooperation is significant. Most informed Americans would agree that the United States' relationship with Japan is at a critical juncture as both nations seek to find new methods of handling the pressing global issues facing them. Unfortunately for the United States, however, few major countries in the world are less well understood by the American public than is Japan (Pempel, 1986).

One attempt to increase American understanding of Japanese life and culture has been the establishment of the Southwest Program for Teaching About Japan (SPTAJ), housed in the College of Education at Texas Tech University. Among the major purposes of the SPTAJ is to organize curriculum materials about Japan for dissemination and to encourage increased teaching about Japan in American social studies classrooms. The main idea behind the project is that increased teaching about Japan in American schools will, in the long term, improve American/Japanese relations. The SPTAJ's focus is for the three state area of Texas, Oklahoma, and Louisiana. The project is funded by a three year, $350,000 grant from the U.S.- Japan Foundation. Several other regional centers, also funded by the U.S.-Japan Foundation, have been established elsewhere in the United States.

Presently, however, we are not fully aware of the degree to which content information about Japan is presented in American schools. How much teaching time is devoted to the study of Japan? What specific content areas about Japan are presented? How does interest in the teaching about Japan compare with other countries studied? The purpose of this study was to gather and report research findings from a sample of social studies teachers in Texas, Oklahoma, and Louisiana which would provide answers to these and related research questions.

Methodology and Treatment

The sample used for this study consisted of 475 secondary world history teachers, selected at random, in K-12 school districts scattered across Texas, Oklahoma, and Louisiana. The study was limited to these three states in order to correlate with the focus of the SPTAJ. A mailing list, purchased from Market Data Retrieval Incorporated (1987) indicated a total of 1,897 secondary world history teachers in the three state study area. This included teachers in both public and private secondary schools. For the study purposes, a world history teacher was defined as any teacher assigned to teach at least one world history class as a part of his/her regular teaching load. The study was conducted in the Spring of 1987, at the very close of the 1986-87 school year.

A 21 item self-administered questionnaire was designed, pre-tested, and revised for the purpose of gathering responsive and revelant data. Questionnaires were mailed to each of the 475 teachers selected in the sample. Responses were returned from 195 teachers for a return rate of 41.1 percent. Of the responses, 124 were received from Texas; 49 from Oklahoma; and 22 from Louisiana. Most of the teachers participating in the study were teacning in high schools (75.4 percent). The others taught either at the junior high school level (14.4 percent) or were teaching both junior and senior high school students (10.3 percent).

The Statistical Analysis System (SAS) computer program for the social sciences was used to list the frequency

distributions; and to calculate the mean, standard deviation, and range for each of the variables taken from the questionnaire.

Findings

Teachers responding to the survey had taught an average of 13 years. The range ran from one year to 35 years, with a standard deviation of 7.7 years. Of their 13 years in the classroom, the mean number of years teaching world history was eight. The variable was somewhat broad, however, with a standard deviation of 6.2 years. The vast majority of teachers (91.5 percent) were state certified to teach world history. Yet almost one in 12 (8.5 percent) were not. While in college, most respondents had either majored or minored in some aspect of the social studies. The most frequently reported discipline was history (77.6 percent) followed a considerable distance by geography (12.4 percent) and political science (10.0 percent). Most teachers taught other classes in addition to world history. The mean number of world history classes taught per individual teacher was three with an average student enrollment per class of 24.

What foreign countries do world history teachers enjoy most teaching about? In priority order, those most frequently reported were England, Russia, Germany, France, Japan, and China. What foreign countries do world history teachers think are the most important for American youth to learn about today? Again, in priority order: Russia, China, Japan, England, and those in the Middle East.

How much time do world history teachers spend teaching about Japan during the school year? Teachers in the sample indicated that the average number of teaching hours spent per year in their classes on Japan was between seven to seven and one-half. This number is somewhat deceiving, however, since the standard deviation reported for this variable was 6.8 hours. Some teachers devoted little to virtually no time at all to the study of Japan, while others measurably exceeded the average of seven to seven and one-half hours reported. The major topics covered during the time period in which instruction did concentrate on Japan, in descending order of frequency reported, were Japan's participation in World War II, followed very closely by a study of the ancient history of Japan. Other topics studied, but much less frequently reported, were the opening of Japan to the West by Commodore Perry and the history of Japan since World War II. Surprisingly, very little attention was given to Japan's role as a world leader in trade and industry. In fact, teachers reported that, on the average, more attention was given to a study of Japanese arts and crafts than to the nation's production of computer and advanced electronic and technology products.

Presentation of topics dealing with the study of Japan most likely included teacher prepared lectures and student discussions, followed by student assigned textbook readings, and finally the showing of commercial films or other media. Very few teachers, (only 11.8 percent) stated that they invited a guest speaker to talk about Japan. And, although

educational films ranked as the third most common methodology used to teach about Japan, the actual showing of films was reported in only 37.7 percent of the classes.

Responses on a five point Likert-type scale indicated that over 55.7 percent of the teachers felt that their college training did not adequately prepare them to teach about Japan. Close to one-half of the teachers (41.7 percent) agreed that more emphasis should be given to teaching about Japan in American schools. Nevertheless, 56.7 percent felt that it was not necessary to offer Japanese language as an elective foreign language. One teacher in three (34.0 percent) felt that the United States should not impose a trade embargo on Japan, while one in five (22.2 percent) felt that we should. And three-fourths of the teachers (74.7 percent) were interested in receiving additional resource material to assist in their teaching about Japan. (See Table 1.)

Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to assess the extent to which information about Japan is taught in secondary world history classrooms in Texas, Oklahoma, and Louisiana. From the study sample, it was determined that the amount of teaching time devoted to the study of Japan varies significantly between teachers. For the most part, world history teachers spend between six to seven class hours studying Japan. Some, however, spend more than this and others spend much less. In those classes where time is devoted to the study of Japan, the country's participation

in World War II is most frequently emphasized, followed by coursework on the ancient history of Japan. Very little attention is given to Japan's economic growth or to the country's role as a world trade leader. Student exposure to the study of Japan will most likely be by listening to their teachers' lecture or from readings in their textbooks. Only about one-third of the students are likely to view an education film or filmstrip on Japan. And very few students would be exposed to a guest lecturer talk about Japan. Teachers rank the importance of teaching about Japan rather high. Only Russia and China were rated as more important. Yet, in terms of personal preference in teaching it ranks fifth, falling behind England, Russia, Germany and France.

We live in an increasingly complex and changing world. The need for mutual understanding and respect between nations has perhaps never been greater. This is particularly true between the United States and Japan. Forty years ago the two countries were adversaries in a devastating world war. Today both nations are striving for economic prosperity. Business and trade contacts between the United States and Japan are increasing rapidly, and this is happening at a time when tensions over trade imbalances, tariffs, quotas, and import/export ratios are growing. American youth in today's schools will be the future political and business leaders of the future. It is imperative that today's young people have a thorough exposure to other countries and cultures. Increased understanding about Japan can only improve relations between

these two great nations. A truly informed populace will assist us in working out our trade disagreements, and help us avoid repeating mistakes of the past.

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Table 1

Attitudes of secondary world history teachers in Texas, Oklahoma, and Louisiana regarding the teaching about Japan in their classes, 1987. Reported by percent; N = 195.

variable	No Response 0	Strongly Disagree 1	2	3	4	Strongly Agree 5
The world history text I use contains good content coverage to teach about Japan	4.1	7.7	17.0	41.8	20.6	58.8
My students seem to enjoy learning and studying about Japan	5.2	12.6	12.4	41.8	29.9	8.2
My college training provided me with a good knowledge base to teach about Japan	2.1	26.8	28.9	25.3	11.3	5.7
More emphasis should be given to teaching about Japan in our schools	3.6	3.1	9.3	42.3	30.4	11.3
I would like to obtain more resource information to assist in my teaching about Japan	2.1	3.1	6.2	14.0	27.5	47.2
The U.S. government should impose a trade embargo on Japan	5.2	12.4	21.6	38.7	12.4	9.8
Japanese language should be offered as a foreign language elective in American high schools	3.6	22.7	33.5	26.8	6.7	6.7